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UNCLAS GEORGETOWN 000292

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SUBJECT: GUYANA TO SEEK ADDITIONAL FIBER OPTIC
CAPACITY

REF: A) GEORGETOWN 219 B) 05 GEORGETOWN 1273

1. Pierre Strasser, the French-national Chief Operating Officer of American-owned wireless communications provider Cel*Star Guyana, informed Embassy on March 27 that the GOG will likely pursue inclusion in a second fiber optic communications cable, with construction to be completed by early 2007. The new cable, being constructed by the French Groupe Loret, will link the French possessions of St. Martin, Guadelope, Martinique, and French Guiana. Strasser suggested that the cable will require a repeater between Martinique and French Guyana. Thus a landing in Guyana could be advantageous to Groupe Loret as well. Strasser estimates the cost of extending the cable to Guyana at US\$4 million.

2. Guyana is currently served by the Americas II cable, a submarine cable that connects Florida, Puerto Rico, USVI, the Eastern Caribbean, Martinique, Curacao, Trinidad, Venezuela, and French Guiana. The cable then runs overland from French Guiana back through Suriname to Guyana. Currently, disruptions to the vulnerable cable significantly impact the quality and consistency of communication (Ref A). While President Jagdeo did not announce the cable project at the launch of the GOG's National ICT Workshop on March 28, as Strasser expected, Jagdeo has consistently identified service disruptions and a lack of bandwidth as an obstacle to development of IT services in Guyana (Ref B). Strasser suggested that the new cable would be used exclusively for internet traffic so as to avoid raising complications with Guyana Telephone and Telegraph's monopoly over voice communications.

3. COMMENT: The terms of the 1991 agreement granting U.S. firm Atlantic Tele-Network (ATN) 80% of GT&T stipulate that GT&T will have an exclusive license for "national and international voice and data transmission" as well as "switched or non-switched private line service supported by facilities constructed over public right of way". It is not clear to post that internet services would not be covered under that agreement. For a point of reference, the agreement also gives GT&T a non-exclusive license to provide cellular telephone service, a market which Cel*Star entered only after a prolonged regulatory battle. The introduction of a second fibre optic cable, even if it provides no voice communications, may spark a vigorous challenge to GT&T's exclusive license agreement. END COMMENT.

BULLEN